

Factsheet on Ready-To-Eat meals and its potential in enhancing food security

Food security is an existential issue for Singapore and an important part of Singapore’s total defence. However, as a small, trade-dependent country with an open economy, Singapore cannot be insulated from supply disruptions due to climate change, disease outbreaks or geopolitical developments. Such disruptions can happen at any time and from any source.

The Singapore Food Agency (SFA) adopts a multi-pronged approach which includes (i) diversifying food import sources to reduce the risk of reliance on any single food supply source, (ii) increasing local production by building the agri-food industry’s capability and capacity to sustainably produce 30 per cent of the country’s nutritional needs by 2030, and (iii) stockpiling of essential food items to ensure food security during crisis or emergencies.

SFA and SATS’ collaboration on conceptualising Ready-To-Eat (RTE) meals

Ready-To-Eat (RTE) meals can play a role in enhancing food security during crisis or emergency by providing quick and convenient access to sustenance.

RTE meals have long shelf life, are shelf stable (can be stored at room temperature conditions) and require minimal preparation, making them ideal for situations (e.g., crisis, emergencies) where resources, time, or infrastructure may be limited.

SFA is collaborating with SATS, Asia's pre-eminent provider of food solutions and a global leader in gateway services, to conceptualise such RTE meals with food security as the key consideration.

The RTE meals were specifically designed for this collaboration, to (i) provide basic sustenance by covering the main nutrient groups of carbohydrate, protein, and fibre; (ii) introduce local produce¹ and its benefits, where local spinach (bayam), mushrooms, and fish are used in the RTE meals and (iii) encourage flexibility and adaptability in food choices, such as choosing frozen² ingredients over chilled, where frozen chickens are used as an ingredient in one of the meals too.

SFA-MOE Pilot Programme to introduce RTE meals

SFA is partnering the Ministry of Education (MOE) to educate and empower young Singaporeans on food security, as part of Total Defence Day commemoration activities.

The first phase of the pilot programme was rolled out from 19 to 26 Oct 2023. Close to 2,800 students and teachers across 10 secondary schools were introduced to the following RTE meal options. Prior to the rollout, SFA had engaged with MOE on the suitability of these RTE meal options for students.

Meal option (Halal)	Local produce used	Alternatives used
Baked Fish with Chunky Tomato	Bayam Abalone mushroom Barramundi	-
Vegetable Ragout (Vegan Plant Based)	Bayam Abalone mushroom	Plant-based seafood
Makhani Chicken with Briyani Rice	Bayam Abalone mushroom	Frozen chicken

Teachers engaged students on the importance of food resilience and the relevance of RTE meals using resources co-developed by MOE and SFA. It was well received by participating students who shared that they had gained a better understanding of the reality of food disruptions and were more willing to be adaptable in their food choices. The pilot also piqued students' interest in farming in Singapore and the science behind how RTE meals are prepared.

SFA and MOE will roll out the second phase of the pilot programme to approximately 50,000 students and teachers across 40 secondary schools on 15 and 16 Feb 2024, in line with the commemoration of Total Defence Day.

Food security is a joint responsibility – *play your part by practising the ABCs*

The critical success factor of our food security is the ability of businesses, consumers and policymakers to adapt, adjust and remain resilient.

Households could maintain a reasonable pantry of extra food that will last up to two weeks, such as Ready-To-Eat meals, as well as staple foods (e.g., frozen and canned meat and vegetables). A well-stocked pantry at home with RTE meals and staple food can be maintained prudently so that it can be tapped on whenever necessary.

Households can also contribute to our food security by accommodating to changes and pivoting to other food types in times of disruptions. When supply chain disruptions happen, consumers can also play their part by practising the ABCs:

- **A**dapt and be flexible with your food options
- **B**uy and keep a reasonable amount of non-perishable food in your pantry for emergencies
- **C**onsume only what you need and choose alternatives³

Even when there is no food supply disruption, consumers can continue to be open and flexible in their food choices, such as by choosing frozen products over chilled ones, or canned alternatives over fresh ones.

¹Local food production is one of Singapore's strategies in strengthening food security and mitigating our reliance on imports. Local produce is grown close to our homes, and is therefore fresher, lasts longer, retains more nutrients, and incurs lower transport/food miles. We encourage Singaporeans to eat local to spur our farmers to increase their production, and in turn reap benefits of economies of scale and generate exciting jobs for our people.

²Frozen meat comes from meat that is freshly slaughtered and the commercial blast freezing process keeps meat at its freshest. On the contrary, the practice of buying chilled meat and freezing it in the refrigerator freezer could affect the quality of the meat as ice crystals can form on the meat which damages the cell membrane.

³Choose alternatives such as frozen or canned food options.